

Women deserve better than the likes of Thomas and the Garden



ROBIN COLLUM

Sports Commentary

As sports editor, and one of only two females on the *Gateway* editorial staff, I often complain about the often extremely graphic “dudeversations” that I’m forced to overhear, not to mention having to deal with some male athletes who keep their eyes significantly below my face during interviews, if you catch my drift.

That said, it’s nothing compared to what some women have to deal with in the workplace. Women like Anucha Browne Sanders, who was vice-president of marketing and business operations for the New York Knicks, on Wednesday, a jury ruled in her favour, bringing to an end a three-week-long sexual harassment trial she filed against the Knicks organization, Madison Square Garden (MSG), and Knicks President and head coach Isiah Thomas.

According to Browne Sanders, Thomas treated her terribly when he was hired by the Knicks in 2003, discriminating on her because of her gender and referring to her as a “bitch” and a “ho.”

The married father of two eventually changed his opinion of her, however, and began treating her terribly in a different way: making unwanted advances, trying to kiss her, and repeatedly inviting her to get to know him better with a few “off-site” visits. When she complained to her bosses, and asked co-workers to back up her

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claims, she was fired for “incompetence.” So she took them all to court for harassment and wrongful dismissal—and rightfully so.

The fact that MSG was held responsible for their actions is fantastic—they’re being forced to pay \$8.6 million in reparations for condoning a hostile work environment and retaliation, while chairman, James Dolan, is on the hook for another \$3 million for being the one who fired her and for doing so in such a childish and petty manner. It seems slightly ridiculous that Thomas wasn’t found liable for any money; regardless, the whole affair has brought the issue of treatment of women in male-dominated workplaces back to the front of peoples’ minds.

To a certain extent, one expects sexism and crudeness to exist in an all-male environment like, say, a locker room. Though it’s hardly ideal, it’s private and not particularly harmful as long as it stays within those walls. It’s basically more of a bonding exercise than anything else. But it’s when that sort of attitude leaves the locker room and enters a place of work that it becomes completely unacceptable. In the case of Browne Sanders and the Knicks, it seems that blatant sexism was, if not actually encouraged, at least accepted; otherwise, Browne Sanders would never have been fired.

It’s outrageous that, in this day and

age, people would still be pulling this crap. This isn’t the ‘50s; the moustachioed executive can’t just pinch his secretary’s behind and expect just a giggle in response. It seems as well that these sort of incidences are especially prevalent in the sports world; hearing the sort of insults Browne Sanders had to endure inevitably brings to mind the Don Imus scandal earlier this year. Though of course he was mainly being a racist prick when he called the Rutgers University women’s basketball team “nappy-headed hos” on the radio, he was also being a sexist pig.

It’s about time that women in business, sports, and the business of sports stood up for themselves and their place in their professions. Browne Sanders deserved her job with the Knicks as much as any of her co-workers did; a college basketball star herself with Northwestern University, and an experienced marketer who had been with the Knicks longer than Thomas has, it was unacceptable that she was made to feel uncomfortable at work.

Women shouldn’t have to play along, act like “one of the boys,” or put up with bullshit like Thomas was dishing out. Browne Sanders did us all a favour by standing up for herself, and sent a message to teams and boardrooms everywhere that women belong in the world of sports, and deserve respect.

... And so do the Knicks and their fans

Even Kobe’s post-alleged-rape behaviour better than Thomas’ present attitude



NICK FROST

Sports Commentary

As anyone I’ve ever discussed basketball with can tell you, I generally don’t care for Kobe Bryant, be it his attitude, his ball-hogging abilities, or his “extracurricular endeavours,” if you catch my drift. Having said that I’m always one to give credit where credit is due, so here goes: at least Kobe had the balls to show some sort of remorse for his sexual wrongdoings, even if it was just the infidelity and not the accused rape.

Whether it was genuine or just a well-scripted template of an acceptance speech, at least he came out and said something that showed even a glimmer of self-reflection and the realization that he had done something wrong, and was apologetic towards his wife for having done so.

On the other hand, with the recent scandal surrounding New York Knicks head coach Isiah Thomas, I’m absolutely astonished at the completely nonchalant attitude that he has adopted towards the whole matter—despite having been found guilty within the first two days of deliberation of sexually harassing former

Knicks executive Anucha Browne Sanders—by further insulting her by publicly stating that he was thinking entirely about basketball and his team’s upcoming season during the whole three-week trial.

To walk around and exude confidence that you are innocent during the trial is one thing, but to come out and essentially say that calling someone a “bitch” (among other things) and making sexual advances in the workplace isn’t important compared to coaching a team that will probably, once again, finish outside of the Eastern Conference playoff race is absolutely baffling.

Even worse than that, however, is the attitude of the corporate parties involved, whether directly or indirectly, in this situation. The Knicks have yet to lay down any law on either Thomas or Madison Square Garden chairman James Dolan, and the NBA has refused to even comment on the matter. I mean, this issue may not be really about basketball, but they should be sending some sort of warning signal that this kind of behaviour won’t be tolerated. Mark Bell of the Toronto Maple Leafs committed a hit-and-run outside of the hockey world, and faces a 15-game suspension that began Wednesday night.

But, of course, the commissioner wouldn’t want step on the toes of the NBA team owners—particularly a conglomerate as large, wealthy, and

domineering as the New York Knicks, Cablevision, and MSG group—because they don’t want to suffer the backlash of the owners from any potential revolts. Instead, they put forward a terrible image to the people who support their game. Double-edged sword, I suppose, but loyalty to the NBA fans should really win out here over the businessmen that keep the machine well-oiled.

Thomas also stated that, in his very humble opinion, the trial and conviction wouldn’t be a distraction to his team come pre-season play. Think that something of this magnitude won’t be a distraction—and probably having false hope that this will just go away quickly enough—is just completely irresponsible, not to mention unfair to his players. It’s bad enough that the Knicks have had some mediocre seasons in the past few years, and that their divisional rival Boston Celtics loaded up their roster with three times the star power this offseason, without having to suffer another potential setback in their quest to make it back to the playoffs. The players want to win and to be able to do it in a town as crazy about their basketball team as New York City.

Isiah is running the public’s perception of him into the ground, and will continue to do so until he pulls a Kobe Bryant by coming out and showing some form of remorse not only for what he has done, but what he has put the people around him through.

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